

FORMER COMMERCIAL BANK OF AUSTRALIA, BANKING CHAMBER AND ENTRANCE



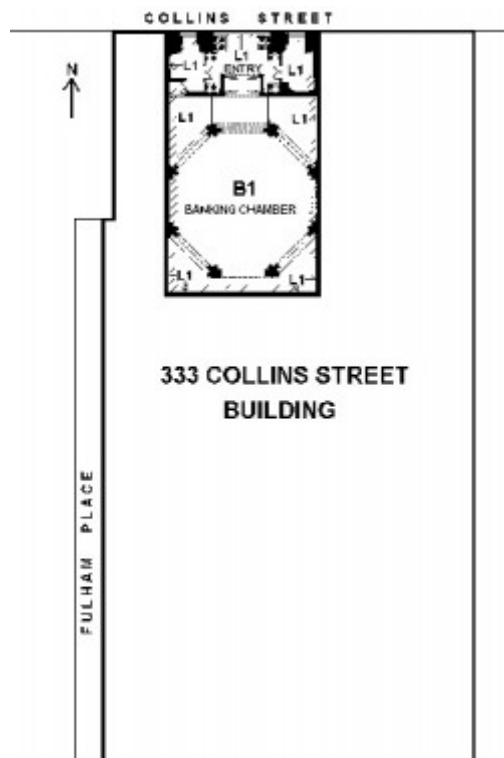
FORMER COMMERCIAL
BANK OF AUSTRALIA,
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ENTRANCE SOHE 2008



banking chamber commercial
bank of australia external
view



banking chamber commercial
bank of australia external
entrance



cba banking chamber and entry plan

Location

327-343 COLLINS STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0035

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO602

VHR Registration

October 9, 1974

Amendment to Registration

February 10, 2000

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - December 2, 1999

What is significant?

On 1 October 1866 the Commercial Bank of Australia Limited commenced business in the spacious building in Collins Street recently fitted out for their accommodation. Then known as No.30 Collins Street West and renumbered 337 in 1889, this address remained the site of the Bank's principal office in the heart of Melbourne's financial district during its whole 116 year existence, except for the period of rebuilding during the 1890s. The first General Manager of the company was George Vallentine who had been recruited from the Bank of Victoria. The existing Banking Chamber and Entry were part of a new head office which was designed and built in the period 1891-93; a time of great financial crisis for Victoria. The design selected by the Bank was a compromise between independent entries by the two architects Lloyd Tayler and Alfred Dunn. The interior Banking Chamber and facade were derived from Tayler's submission and the office accommodation was mainly due to Dunn who was also responsible for the supervision of the construction. Construction began in 1891 and the building was occupied in July 1893. The building remained substantially unaltered until 1939 when the Collins Street facade was demolished and reconstructed to a new design. In 1990 a 29 storey office building was constructed, incorporating the 1893 Banking Chamber and entrance into the design. The Banking Chamber is octagonal in form, approximately 20 metres in diameter and covered by a great plaster dome with an iron and glass lantern. The height of the dome above the main floor of the chamber is approximately 30 metres with the lantern an additional 15 metres above it. The dome is derived from the octagonal plan by the intersection of arches, recalling the constructional system of the great mosques. The first storey consists of semi-circular arches in the Roman form surrounded by a storey of applied temple fronts of the richest decoration. The floor of the Chamber is a detailed mosaic. The 1893 entry is constructed of stone with large iron gates and a central barrel vaulted ceiling.

How is it significant?

The Banking Chamber and Entrance of the former Commercial Bank of Australia are of aesthetic, architectural

and historical importance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The CBA Banking Chamber and Entrance are of architectural and aesthetic importance as remnants of one of the most notable commercial buildings of Melbourne's financial district. The Banking Chamber, entrance vestibule, archway and gates remain from the building erected in 1891-93. Derived from Italian Renaissance and Baroque design the dramatic top-lit Banking Chamber is one of Melbourne's most impressive interiors. The special qualities of the Chamber are embodied in the dome of intersecting ribs and the play of natural light on flat and plastic surfaces, coupled with the skilful resolution of the original functional requirements. The opulent design has been carried through to the joinery, stone entrance and mosaic floor. The structure and its interior are important as the most distinctive work of the architect Lloyd Tayler, as well as his most prestigious commission.

The CBA Banking Chamber and Entrance are of historical importance for their associations with the Commercial Bank of Australia Ltd who had their head office at this site, from 1893 until 1982. The construction of such a grand Banking Chamber represents the early success of the Commercial Bank of Australia due to the Land Boom. By 1888 the peak year of the growth of the metropolitan aspirations of the Marvellous Melbourne, the bank had become the largest in terms of deposits, in the colony of Victoria. Along with other banks in the area the Chamber and Entrance reflects the opulence of Melbourne during the land boom. It is important as one of the last, and perhaps most exuberant examples of this period which was wiped away in the financial crash of 1893. The Commercial Bank of Australia, for all its affluence during the Boom period, suffered tremendously in the disastrous crash of the 1890s. The inception and construction of the Banking Chamber bridges this period in the Bank and Victoria's history. The location of the building reflects the long-standing tradition of this part of Collins Street as the focus for Australia's great financial institutions.

Permit Exemptions

General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must **notify** the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

Specific Exemptions:

General Conditions:

1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.
2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of alterations that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or

object, then the exemption covering such alteration shall cease and the Executive Director shall be notified as soon as possible.

3. If there is a conservation policy and plan approved by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it.

4. Nothing in this declaration prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.

Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authority where applicable.

Interior:

- * Minor repairs and maintenance that replace like with like.

- * Painting of previously painted surfaces provided that preparation or painting does not remove evidence of the original paint or other decorative scheme.

- * Removal of paint from originally unpainted or oiled joinery, doors, architraves, skirtings and decorative strapping.

- * Installation, removal or replacement of hooks, nails and other devices for the hanging of mirrors, paintings and other wall mounted artworks.

- * Installation, removal or replacement of electrical wiring provided that all new wiring is fully concealed and any original light switches, pull cords, push buttons or power outlets are retained in-situ. Note: if wiring original to the place was carried in timber conduits then the conduits should remain in-situ.

- * Installation, removal or replacement of smoke detectors.

Construction dates	1891,
Architect/Designer	Tayler, Lloyd,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	333 COLLINS STREET,
Hermes Number	731
Property Number	

History

Contextual History:

On 1 October 1866 the Commercial Bank of Australia Limited commenced business in the spacious building in Collins Street lately fitted up for their accommodation. Then known as No.30 Collins Street West and renumbered 337 in 1889, this address remained the site of the Bank's principal office in the heart of Melbourne's financial district during its whole 116 years existence, except for the period of rebuilding during the 1890s. The General Manager of the company was George Vallentine who had been recruited from the Bank of Victoria (R.J. Wood 1990, p.1).

Beginning in 1866, after the first flush of the Victorian gold-rushes, as a totally indigenous Melbourne organisation, the Bank assisted the agricultural development of Victoria and under a remarkable general manager grew rapidly, by adventurous amalgamations and by seemingly prudent policy. With an initially cautious tapping of British deposits and modest expansion to the other Australian capitals it became within twenty years the largest bank in the rapidly growing Melbourne of the period (R.J. Wood, 1990, p.vii).

By 1888 the peak year of the growth of the metropolitan aspirations of the Marvellous Melbourne, the bank had become the largest in terms of deposits, in the colony of Victoria.

The subsequent financial collapse of the 1890s had its most traumatic impact in Melbourne and on the fortunes of the Bank. The destruction of commercial values left the Bank severely handicapped for almost three decades of slow and painstaking reconstruction. The subsequent confident and reinvigorated expansion in the 1920s was cut short by the severe depression of the early 1930s followed by the grim experience of war, the threat of

nationalisation, and the intrusion of government regulation. Expansion to New Zealand in 1912 brought eventually a welcome stream of leadership that helped sustain the Bank in its adaptation to modern conditions (R.J. Wood, 1990, p.vii).

In 1968 the Bank was in the forefront of the adoption of revolutionary management methods and explicit planning, which totally transformed its style from the centralised authority that had been appropriate to its earlier conditions of operation. With the successive diversifications of its interests into a finance company, investment services, insurance, travel, merchant banking, and venture capital, the Bank sought to capitalise on its official control of its basic banking functions, and provide a convenient one-stop financial service for its customers (R.J. Wood, 1990, p.vii).

With the growing size of its local competitors, chiefly through amalgamation, the possibility of a merger with another bank was increasingly examined as an alternative to the Bank's continued independent existence in a specialised niche of the financial system. With the increasing internationalisation of financial services, the prospect of relaxation of government controls, and the application of virtually instantaneous electronic communications and accounting systems, the die was cast after 116 years of independence for merger with a larger local banks (R.J. Wood, 1990, p.vii).

History of Place:

The existing Banking Chamber was designed and built in the period 1891-93; a time of great financial crisis for Victoria and the Commercial Bank.

The design selected by the Bank was a compromise between independent entries by the two architects Lloyd Tayler and Alfred Dunn. The interior Banking Chamber and facade were derived from Tayler's submission. The office accommodation was mainly due to Dunn who was also responsible for the supervision of the construction. Construction began in 1891 and the building was occupied in July 1893.

The six-storey facade block included an imposing entrance with massive ornamental gates.

In 1939 the five storey office wing to Collins Street was demolished and replaced by an 8 storey structure. The architects were A.K.Henderson and partners. The building was faced with freestone and incorporated the original barrel vault entry and gates. The building remained substantially unaltered until 1939 when the Collins Street facade was demolished and reconstructed apparently without raising public protest. A portion of this entrance was retained in the 1939 reconstruction, but the remaining facade structure with its ornamental Harcourt and Aberdeen granites and Sydney Pyrmont sandstone was replaced by a less spectacular but presumably more utilitarian block. This left only the domed Banking Chamber and front entry to represent the construction of the 1890 era.

In 1982 the bank merged with the Bank of NSW to form Westpac.

In 1990 a 29-storey office building was constructed, incorporating the dome and entrance into the design. The 1939 facade was removed at this stage and a new design installed.

Associated People: Alfred Dunn;

Assessment Against Criteria

Criterion A

The historical importance, association with or relationship to Victoria's history of the place or object.

The CBA Banking Chamber is of historical importance for its associations with the Commercial Bank of Australia Ltd who had their head office at this site, from 1893 until 1982. The grand Banking Chamber represents the early success of the Commercial Bank of Australia due to the Gold Rush. By 1888 the peak year of the growth of the metropolitan aspirations of the Marvellous Melbourne, the bank had become the largest in terms of deposits, in the colony of Victoria.

Criterion B

The importance of a place or object in demonstrating rarity or uniqueness.

Criterion C

The place or object's potential to educate, illustrate or provide further scientific investigation in relation to Victoria's cultural heritage.

Criterion D

The importance of a place or object in exhibiting the principal characteristics or the representative nature of a place or object as part of a class or type of places or objects.

Only the domed Banking Chamber and a portion of the front entry are left to represent the construction of the 1890 era. Along with other banks in the area the Chamber and entry represents the financial boom period in Melbourne. Its is important as one of the last and perhaps most exuberant examples of that opulent period wiped away in the financial crash of 1893.

Criterion E

The importance of the place or object in exhibiting good design or aesthetic characteristics and/or in exhibiting a richness, diversity or unusual integration of features.

The CBA Banking Chamber is of architectural and aesthetic importance as a most notable commercial building and a fine ornament of Melbourne's financial district. The Banking Chamber, entrance vestibule, archway and gates remain from the building erected in 1891-93. The dramatic top-lit Banking Chamber is one of Melbourne's most impressive interiors, octagonal in plan and crowned by a dome composed of a series of intersecting arches. Derived from Italian Renaissance and Baroque the design is one of the last and perhaps most exuberant examples of that opulent period wiped away in the financial crash of 1893. Unique and of national importance it is one of the finest banking chambers of the Victorian age. The Banking Chamber is important as probably the grandest design by architect Lloyd Tayler.

Criterion F

The importance of the place or object in demonstrating or being associated with scientific or technical innovations or achievements.

Criterion G

The importance of the place or object in demonstrating social or cultural associations.

Criterion H

Any other matter which the Council considers relevant to the determination of cultural heritage significance

Extent of Registration

NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the Heritage Act, I give notice under section 46 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended in that the Heritage Register Number 35 in the category described as a Heritage Place is now described as:

Former Commercial Bank of Australasia, Banking Chamber and Entrance, 327-343 Collins Street, Melbourne, Melbourne City Council.

EXTENT:

1. All the building known as the former Commonwealth Bank of Australia, Banking Chamber, Entrance and Basement marked B1 on Diagram 35 held by the Executive Director.
2. All the land marked L1 on Diagram 35 held by the Executive Director, being part of the land described in Certificate of Title Vol. 9857 Fol. 589.

Dated: 3 February 2000.

RAY TONKIN

Executive Director

[*Victoria Government Gazette* G 6 10 February 2000 p.222]

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>